



NEWS RELEASE

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STATE ED BOARD WILL EXPLORE NEW TESTING OPTIONS AFTER ONLINE WRITING TESTING BREAKDOWNS, AGAIN

- ***Ed Board will review contract with testing firm***

Reoccurring problems with online state testing coupled with state and federal changes have prompted the Nebraska State Board of Education to look for a new direction in state testing.

On Thursday, some State Board of Education members expressed dismay and frustration when they learned that Nebraska students were once again shut out of their online writing tests—twice in late January and, on another occasion, lost access to online testing tools.

State Assessment Director Valorie Foy outlined the series of problems and told the Board that a number of recent events provide an excellent opportunity to take state testing in a new direction.

On Jan. 21, 325 students from 18 schools in six districts were affected during a 1 hour 47 minute partial state outage. On Jan. 27, at least 1,488 students from 112 schools in 85 districts were affected by a statewide outage. And, on Jan. 28, about 5,340 students at 207 schools from 143 districts lost access to testing tools for 4 hours and 7 minutes.

While no student work was lost, Foy said student performance on the test may have been affected. “I was observing in a school district on Thursday morning, January 21,” she said. “Students who experience technology glitches have anxiety. Students are concerned that their work will be lost.”

Nebraska’s new accountability system that credits schools for effective educational practices coupled with a new federal system, *Every Student Succeeds Act*, that is less intrusive as well as proposed changes in state education law present new opportunities, Foy said, at a time when

the state's current online testing system has once again broken down under the oversight of the state's Minneapolis-based testing firm.

Data Recognition Corporation oversees online testing in Nebraska. In 2012-13, the reliability of writing test scores at grades 8 and 11 was considered suspect. Those scores were interpreted with caution because of technology problems. In 2013-14, no scores were released because, again, of technology issues. At that time, DRC assured the State Board of Education that the firm would take additional measures to assure no other problems would occur.

State Board President Rachel Wise of Oakland called the recent outages and loss of testing tools unacceptable, indicating that the State Board will look closely at its contract with DRC and work with Nebraska educators and policy leaders as the department explores new testing options.

"It's time to explore a different direction," Nebraska Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt said. "This pushes me over the top."